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Triennial review of the implementation of recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-eighth session on the in-depth evaluation of political affairs: field special political missions led by the Department of Political Affairs but supported by the Department of Field Support

Report of the Office of Intern al Oversight Services

Summary

The present report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on evaluations submitted to the Committee. This triennial review determined whether the four recommendations endorsed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination on field special political missions led by the Department of Political Affairs but supported by the Department of Field Support had been implemented.

During the past three years, the Department of Political Affairs, together with other relevant United Nations Secretariat actors, including the Department of Field Support, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, has made significant progress in addressing the issues presented in the evaluation undertaken by OIOS in 2008. These included the ill-defined role of special political missions in the field within the broader context of the Organization's peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts; the lack of clarity of the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Political Affairs at Headquarters,

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the Department of Field Support and the field missions; and the insufficient substantive and administrative support received by these missions. Of the four recommendations, three have been implemented and one is in the process of being implemented.

The recommendations and their current status are summarized below.

- **The Department of Political Affairs should develop clear guidelines that define the role and respective responsibilities of special political missions.** This recommendation has been implemented. One of the major accomplishments of the Department of Political Affairs in responding to the OIOS evaluation has been the development of guidelines for special political missions, with a particular emphasis on the principles of integration, in order to ensure sharper definition and greater clarity of their role and responsibilities.

- **The Department of Political Affairs should improve mission strategic planning.** This recommendation is in the process of being implemented. Greater efforts are still required to improve strategic planning for special political missions in the field because progress in this area has not been consistent from one mission to another. One area where all special political missions need more in-depth work is the further development of meaningful indicators of achievement.

- **The Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Field Support should formalize and improve cooperation and coordination in planning and support of special political missions.** This recommendation has been implemented. In comparison with three years ago, the definition of the respective roles of the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Field Support regarding special political missions is more precise. An overarching framework for cooperation and coordination between the Departments was finalized with the signing of the service level agreement in January 2011. Another important step in formalizing the cooperation between these two Departments was the signing of the policy on delegated authority in United Nations field missions led by the Department of Political Affairs and supported by the Department of Field Support.

- **The Department of Political Affairs should develop appropriate mechanisms for overall management, coordination and oversight of special political missions.** This recommendation has been implemented. The efforts to shift from an exclusively analytical to a more field-based and operational approach to mission planning and support have improved mission management overall. Firstly, initiatives such as the establishment of the Senior Management Team and the Senior Appointments Panel reflect the commitment to improve management and accountability within the most senior ranks of the Department. Greater clarity with respect to the roles of Headquarters and the field has also enhanced coordination and established more realistic expectations for both parties. Finally, the strengthening of the knowledge management system has provided tools and platforms that foster learning and information-sharing for the continuous improvement of the work of special political missions in the field.

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-eighth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the in-depth evaluation of political affairs: field special political missions led by the Department of Political Affairs but supported by the Department of Field Support.[1] The four recommendations included in the report were endorsed by the Committee.[2]

2. The objective of this triennial review was to present the status of implementation of each of the four recommendations.

3. The methodology for the triennial review included: (a) a review and analysis of progress reports on the status of recommendations that are periodically monitored through the OIOS Issue Track database; (b) an analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from the Department of Political Affairs; and (c) interviews with relevant managers and staff in the Department, including officers in the field. The comments of the Department of Political Affairs on the draft report are included in the annex to the present report.

II. Results

4. OIOS found that, of the four recommendations, three had been implemented and one was in the process of being implemented. The implementation status of each recommendation is presented below.

Recommendation 1: The Department of Political Affairs, along with other relevant United Nations Secretariat actors (including the Department of Field Support, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and other relevant United Nations actors), should develop clear guidelines that define special political missions, their role in the peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts of the United Nations and the respective responsibilities of relevant United Nations Secretariat departments with respect to leadership and support to the missions.

5. The Department and other relevant United Nations Secretariat actors have formulated guidelines to define with greater clarity special political missions in the

[1] E/AC.51/2008/2. The missions assessed in the report were: the United Nations Office for West Africa/United Nations support for the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic, United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone, United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi, Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, and United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), under special political missions thematic cluster III, as well as the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, which has a similar support structure. It is worth noting that UNMIN formally closed on 15 January 2011 and the United Nations Office for Central Africa will be inaugurated in early 2011. In this report, the terms "special political mission in the field", "special political mission" and "mission" will be used in reference to these missions.

[2] See A/63/16, paras. 368-371.

field and the roles and responsibilities of the various departments involved. An overall analysis was presented in the report of the Secretary-General on estimates in respect of special political missions as part of the programme budget for the biennium 2010/11 (A/64/349). This document included: details of an analysis of the criteria for establishing special political missions; the basis for proposing different modalities and structures, including the distinct roles, functions and planning involved; the means available for reviewing the activities, key benchmarks and overall performance of special political missions, including mechanisms or benchmarks for recommending closure; and issues related to backstopping and funding of special political missions.[3]

6. In addition, the updates to the Secretary-General's bulletins on the organization of the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Field Support have better outlined the respective roles and responsibilities of these two Departments pertaining to special political missions in the field.[4] The signing of the service level agreement[5] and the policy on delegated authority in United Nations field missions led by the Department of Political Affairs and supported by the Department of Field Support[6] further formalized the responsibilities of each Department and clarified their respective support and administrative functions.[7]

7. Finally, guidelines issued by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on the integrated mission planning process assisted the Department of Political Affairs to better understand and play a leading role in this type of mission. In terms of the support and advice provided by Headquarters, the publication of the Department of Political Affairs guidelines regarding Headquarters support for special political missions set clear expectations and made the Department of Political Affairs desk officers more involved in operational matters with regard to providing administrative support.[8]

8. This recommendation has been implemented. Further attention is required to refine the role and responsibilities of special political missions in the field vis-à-vis the Peacebuilding Support Office. In the past three years, the Peacebuilding Support Office has increased the activities of the Peacebuilding Fund within the United Nations peacebuilding arena; thus, better understanding of their respective niches at all levels could enhance the United Nations role in post conflict scenarios.[9]

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[3] A/64/349, paras. 10-80.

[4] ST/SGB/2009/13 and ST/SGB/2010/2, respectively.

[5] Available from http://dpaintranet.un.org/DPAIntranetDocs/Documents/Service_Level_Agreement_DPA_DFS.pdf.

[6] Available from http://dpaintranet.un.org/DPAIntranetDocs/Documents/DPA-DFS_Policy_Delegated%20Authority%20-%20SPMs_January%202011.pdf.

[7] More details on the service level agreement can be found below under recommendation 3 (para. 14).

[8] See "HQ support to special political missions: guidelines for desk officers", August 2009 (paras. 8-11).

[9] In alignment with the OIOS report, "Independent evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund: 'Fund fills clear niche and has seen early results, but must become speedier, more efficient and more strategic to fulfil its vision'" (IED-08-06), recommendation 1 states that the Peacebuilding Support Office should, in consultation with key stakeholders and through a systematic mapping exercise, improve the clarity of the role of the Office and that of its key partners in the Fund's guiding documents and in its stakeholder communications.

Recommendation 2: The Department of Political Affairs should improve mission strategic planning by ensuring that a clear mission strategy is developed and documented for each special political mission. Making use of existing United Nations planning approaches, the mission strategy should describe: (a) the intended overall role and goals of the mission; (b) the expected activities of the mission and how those activities will contribute to the achievement of the mission mandate; (c) the expected time required to achieve the mandate; and (d) indicators or criteria that may be used in measuring mission progress and in determining whether the mission can be said to have accomplished its mandate. The Department of Political Affairs noted that it should be clear that through the established results-based budgeting process, much of what is recommended already takes place.

9. The Department has made significant progress in improving the strategic planning of special political missions by attempting to focus on longer-term objectives, despite the typically shorter-term mandates for this type of mission. Notwithstanding the challenges of planning for political work in general, the value of strategic planning has been generally recognized in the Department, as evidenced by the development and dissemination of strategic planning guidelines. Since 2008, the senior management in the field has been briefed on integration and strategic planning,[10] and Department of Political Affairs staff at different levels has attended seven joint strategic planning workshops. Furthermore, all special political missions, except the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and UNMIN, have received a support mission for strategic planning from the Department of Political Affairs at Headquarters in the last three years.[11] In addition, the special political budget submissions now include posts for strategic planners in the staffing tables for special political missions.

10. A review of budget and planning documents[12] showed that a framework for planning had been established, although its practical implementation still varied considerably from one mission to another.[13] Acknowledging that flexibility was a valued characteristic of special political missions in the field, as well as the limitations of the results-based-budgeting framework as a strategic document, it was

[10] Five of the 12 heads of special political missions in thematic cluster III were individually briefed in 2009 and 2010.

[11] Two missions were taken to West Africa, Guinea-Bissau and Somalia, and one to Burundi, the Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Lebanon and Iraq.

[12] The 2010/11 budget documents and the latest planning documents provided by the Department of Political Affairs for seven special political missions in the field selected by OIOS for an in-depth review were varied and included: the terms of reference of the Central African Republic Integrated Task Force, Guinea-Bissau United Nations Development Assistance Framework, UNIOGBIS workplan, UNPOS strategy paper, Burundi strategic assessment, UNMIN liquidation plan, terms of reference of the Iraq Integrated Task Force and Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process integrated strategic framework.

[13] Of the planning documents that were submitted by the Department of Political Affairs and reviewed by OIOS, one of the seven was developed by the mission with the Department of Field Support and three of the seven described the role of the integrated task force for a particular country, thus establishing the mechanism for strategic planning, but not necessarily the resulting strategy. Three of the seven were documents presenting a strategy, but one was still a draft, another was very comprehensive but lacked an implementation matrix for follow-up, and the last one was a strategic assessment report outlining the transition alternatives for the mission. For the most part, the alignment between these documents and the budget was weak.

noted that results-based-budgeting documents only provided the minimum framework for strategic planning. Thus, the absence of a standardized planning document left room for the uneven quality and coverage of strategic mission workplans. Most of the revised mission planning documents lacked meaningful or realistic indicators of achievement, and in some, the link between outputs and the mission mandate was tenuous.

11. As noted during interviews with Department of Political Affairs staff, in the fluid environment of many special political missions, where situations change rapidly, there is an inherent challenge to carry out strategic planning with explicit objectives while at the same time maintaining some flexibility to adapt for unanticipated events. Nevertheless, greater efforts to develop stronger indicators of achievement are still required.

12. This recommendation is in the process of being implemented. In order for OIOS to consider this recommendation implemented, the Department must ensure further harmonization of the format and scope of the manner in which missions articulate a clear and comprehensive mission strategy and the way it is linked to their workplan.

Recommendation 3: The Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Field Support should agree and prepare terms of reference or guidelines that formalize and improve cooperation and coordination in the planning and support of special political missions. The terms of reference or guidelines should clarify the respective roles, responsibilities and standards for interaction between the departments to ensure that mission resources and support are better tailored to mission circumstances and need. The Department of Political Affairs noted that draft guidelines are already under preparation. The Department of Field Support noted that it has also developed a general menu of support services that it can offer to the Department of Political Affairs and Department of Political Affairs-led missions as means of clarifying roles and responsibilities and building shared expectations.

13. Both the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Field Support have made efforts to formalize their cooperation and coordination in the support of special political missions. A key accomplishment in this regard is the policy on delegated authority in United Nations field missions led by the Department of Political Affairs and supported by the Department of Field Support, which defines and describes the exercise and direction of strategic and operational level authority for field missions, including reporting lines, management structures, security authority and financial authority in the field.

14. A service level agreement between the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Field Support regarding special political missions in the field was finalized and signed by both Departments in January 2011. This agreement specifies that the Department of Political Affairs is responsible for providing overall strategic direction, management and political and policy guidance to the missions, while the responsibilities of the Department of Field Support include providing administrative and logistical support services. The agreement further attributes responsibilities for functional areas (finance and budget, personnel and staffing, logistics, information and communications technology, and conduct and discipline) and for the different

phases of a mission (start-up, budget preparation, performance reporting, implementation of approved budgets and transition and liquidation).

15. This recommendation has been implemented. As the agreement has now come into effect, both Departments should ensure adequate dissemination among relevant managers and staff.

Recommendation 4: The Department of Political Affairs should develop appropriate mechanisms for overall Department of Political Affairs management, coordination and oversight of special political missions.

A first step could be the establishment of policies or processes within the Department of Political Affairs for more formalized coordination and knowledge-sharing in the planning and support of special political missions (including the regular participation of Headquarters staff in the development and review of mission workplans), as well as clarification of overall responsibility and accountability within the Department for mission performance and results. Departmental policies and procedures for management of special political missions should also include guidance on better monitoring and reporting of mission performance against benchmarks and on the use of performance information in guiding mission activities. The Department of Political Affairs noted that the above-mentioned process is already under way.

16. The Department has achieved concrete results regarding the management, coordination and oversight of special political missions. Firstly, improved selection mechanisms of senior field management are in place through the Senior Appointments Panel. A strong accountability framework was also established with the compacts between the Secretary-General and the heads of mission. The role of Department of Political Affairs desk officers in backstopping and supporting the field missions has been clearly defined in the guidelines mentioned in recommendation 1, and there has been increased participation of Headquarters staff in mission strategic planning.

17. Furthermore, the Policy and Mediation Division of the Department of Political Affairs, with the approval of the Senior Management Team,[14] developed several useful guidelines for special political missions and set up a knowledge management system. Both have provided greater clarity of individual and working unit responsibilities as well as generated tools and mechanisms for learning and sharing information in more efficient ways. The regular meetings of the special political missions group, including participants from the Department of Field Support, have improved management and established a platform for generating inputs for decision-making and sharing good practices and lessons learned.

18. Among the most valuable knowledge management initiatives for special political missions in the field are:

- The issuance in August 2010 by the Department of Political Affairs of the report on recommendations from lesson learned studies on transition processes in the context of integrated peacebuilding offices

[14] The Senior Management Team meets twice a month and comprises the Under-Secretary-General (Chair), the two Assistant Secretaries-General and all the Department's Directors.

- The Peacemaker database, a comprehensive knowledge management tool containing guidance material, tools and knowledge essays
- A mediation start-up kit comprising guidelines, a resources package and a training module
- The Department of Political Affairs operational Intranet, a platform for sharing lesson learned documents, guidance and information across field missions and Headquarters, launched in 2010
- The allocation of funds for the development of field mission start-up guidelines.

19. Finally, strong management and oversight depend on the use of reliable performance reporting, which the Department of Political Affairs is still refining. The development of more meaningful indicators, as mentioned in recommendation 2, is a continuous effort that could contribute to enhance mission monitoring and reporting of performance.

20. This recommendation has been implemented.

III. Conclusion

21. During the past three years, there has been significant progress in addressing the vulnerabilities regarding special political missions in the field as identified in the 2008 OIOS report. Three of the four evaluation recommendations endorsed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination have been implemented. The overall strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs has positively influenced the management, coordination and accountability of special political missions in the field. In addition, the development and implementation of guidelines have led to more focused missions, which are trying to build on the complementarities with other United Nations actors in the peacebuilding and conflict prevention arena. Finally, the efforts to formally define the terms of cooperation and collaboration between the Department of Field Support and the Department of Political Affairs in supporting special political missions have contributed to a constructive discussion between both Departments about the ways in which the Department of Field Support can better serve the specific needs of the Department of Political Affairs in the field.

22. Fulfilling the aspirations of field integration requires constant work and revision. Despite the progress and strong efforts that have been made to improve mission strategic planning, further refinement is needed, especially in terms of more meaningful indicators of achievement and better alignment between mission activities, accomplishments and objectives, all of which are needed to contribute to improved conflict prevention and strengthened peacebuilding.

Annex

Comments received from the Department of Political Affairs on the triennial review of the implementation of recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-eighth session on the in-depth evaluation of political affairs*

1. We have reviewed the draft and very much appreciate that it acknowledges the significant progress made by the Department of Political Affairs, together with other departments, in addressing the issues presented in the 2008 evaluation and the improvements made in supporting field special political missions led by the Department of Political Affairs. Improving the support for our field presences remains a high priority for the Department. In that regard, we also note your suggestion that further harmonization is needed with respect to the format and scope of the manner in which missions articulate a clear and comprehensive mission strategy and the way it is linked to their workplan. We will work together with special political missions towards that objective during 2011.

2. We are also grateful for the constructive and helpful approach OIOS staff demonstrated during the preparation of the draft report and look forward to further cooperation.

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* This practice was instituted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation made by the Independent Audit Advisory Committee. Overall, the Department of Political Affairs concurred with the recommendations made by OIOS.